DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 084 469 CG 008 476

AUTHOR	Kimball, Ronald; Gelso, Charles J.
TITLE	Self-Actualization in a Marathon Growth Group: Do the Strong Get Stronger?
INSTITUTION	Maryland Univ., College Park. Counseling Center.
REPORT NO	RR-6-73
PUB DATE	73
NOTE	37p.; Paper presented at the American Sociological Association Meeting, 27-30 August 1973, New York, N. Y.
AVAILABLE FROM	Charles J. Gelso, Counseling Center, University of Maryland, College Park 20742
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	College Students; *Counseling Effectiveness; Group Counseling; *Group Experience; Mental Health; Research; *Self Actualization; Self Concept; *Sensitivity Training; *T Groups
IDENTIFIERS	*Personal Orientation Inventory

ABSTRACT

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SELF-ACTUALIZATION IN A MARATHON GROWTH GROUP: DO THE STRONG GET STRONGER?

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Research Report # 6-73

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Abstract

This study examined the effects of a weekend marathon on the level of self-actualization of college students one and four weeks following their group experience. It also studied the relationship between ego strength and extent of change in self-actualization during a marathon. Generally, the group experience did increase self-actualization and the effects persisted through the fourth week after the group. The possibility of a sleeper effect was discussed, and hypotheses were offered regarding conditions necessary for such groups to be effective. Participants' initial level of ego strength was unrelated to changes in self-actualization.

SELF-ACTUALIZATION IN A MARATHON GROWTH GROUP: DO THE STRONG GET STRONGER?

Despite the popularity of sensitivity training among college students and many professional counselors, attempts to assess empirically the effects of such training are of very recent vintage. Contradictory findings have emerged from this research, at least in part due to methodological difficulties along with a lack of comparability among studies in both research designs and treatments (e.g., Culbert, Clark & Bobele, 1968; Foulds, 1971; Guinan & Foulds, 1970; Meador, 1971; Treppa & Fricke, 1972; University of Massachusetts Counseling Center Staff, 1972; Young & Jacobson, 1970). In addition, only one study (Treppa & Fricke, 1972) has examined outcomes beyond those immediately following treatment.

Following the lead of several researchers (e.g., Kiesler, 1966, Krumboltz, 1966; Paul, 1967), increased attention has been given in the general counseling and therapy literature to the client (and counselor) variables which moderate the outcomes of treatment. Guinan and Foulds (1970) have also raised the question of which kinds of "clients" profit most (and least) from sensitivity or growth groups. In searching for such factors it would seem reasonable to begin by examining objectives and/or elements of growth groups and the group movement itself. One such element of this movement is its attention to "normal" rather than severely disturbed persons (Guinan & Foulds, 1970). Relatedly, one might expect that those who profit most from growth groups are persons who, prior to the experience, have a strong sense of reality and personal adequacy, are reasonably flexible psychologically and manifest at least a good capacity for spontaneity. These qualities are part and parcel of the traditional definition of ego strength (Barron, 1953; Novick, 1965; Sinnett, 1962). Thus, it would be expected

that "client" ego strength is an important moderator of growth group outcomes.

In accord with the above discussion, the purposes of the present experiment were twofold. First, the study sought to ascertain the effects of a marathon growth-group experience on participants' level of self-actualization approximately one and four weeks after the experience. Self-actualization was chosen as the dependent variable because it is highly consonant with the often-stated goals of growth groups and because it has been employed in nearly all outcome studies on the topic. A second purpose was to determine if participants' level of ego strength prior to the group experience was associated with changes in self-actualization during the marathon session.

Notably, no prior study on this topic has at once (a) used a nontreated control group, (b) randomly (or nearly so) assigned subjects to treatment and control groups, (c) contained an equal number of subjects in all treatment cells, and (d) employed more than 10 subjects per treatment. The present study at least partially sought to remedy some of the methodological problems in past research by implementing each of the above experimental features.

Method

Subjects and Subject Selection

The subjects were 28 students (20 males, 8 females) who volunteered to participate in a weekend marathon growth group. Volunteers were solicited through distribution of written information about these groups in several introductory psychology sections and the campus newspaper. It was indicated to potential volunteers that a growth group experience was being offered, and that such groups focused on expanding participants' awareness of

themselves and their ways of relating to others. A brief distinction was made between the foci of growth groups and group therapy, e.g., growth groups more present-oriented, less remedial, less focused on individual "problems". All volunteers participated in a 10-15 minute screening interview with the senior author. This procedure effected the screening out of two volunteers, one who wanted to have a more didactic experience and the other who manifested psychotic symptoms. Screening was discontinued after 28 subjects were obtained.

Instrumentation

The Personal Orientation Inventory (POI), a measure of positive mental health or self-actualization, was used as the criterion measure. The POI (Shostrom, 1966) consists of 150 two-choice, paired-opposite statements of values, behaviors and self-percepts commonly associated with self-actualization. This inventory consists of 12 scales (see Table 1), one of which (Inner Directedness) includes 123 of the 150 items and is, thus, the single most representative measure of self-actualization. Reliability and validity data on the POI are generally quite favorable (Fox, Knapp & Michaels, 1968; Gaff, Bradshaw, Danish & Austin, 1970; Grossak, Armstrong & Lussiev, 1966; Illardi & May, 1968; Klavetter & Morgar, 1967; Knapp, 1965; McClain, 1970; Shostrom, 1965, 1966).

Subjects' ego strength was operationally defined by their pretreatment scores on Barron's Ego Strenth Scale (ES Scale; Barron, 1953) of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory. The ES Scale consists of 68 true-false statements. It has been used as a measure of general psychological health (Herron, 1962; Frank, 1967) as well as a predictor of response to psychotherapy (Barron, 1953). This scale appears to possess adequate reliability (Barron, 1956; Silverman, 1963) and validity (Frank, 1967;

Herron, 1962); the reliability appears acceptable when the Scale is administered, as in the present study, out of the context of the full MMPI (Gaines & Fretz, 1969).

Procedure

Subjects were randomly assigned by sex to an experimental group (10 males, 4 females) and a control group (10 males, 4 females). The experimental group was further divided into two marathon groups (5 males and 2 females each). The groups were run on a Saturday and Sunday in two sessions of between eight and 10 hours each. As in most such groups, the focus was on "here-and-now" experience, interpersonal sharing and feedback. Group and individual "exercises" were used occasionally to foster movement. All groups were run in the Psychology Building of the University of Maryland.

Two highly experienced male-female dyads facilitated the groups. One pair consisted of a Ph.D. clinical psychologist and a third-year doctoral student in counseling; the other dyad consisted of a counseling psychology intern (fourth year of doctoral training) and a third-year doctoral student in counseling. Both pairs were approximately equal in amount of experience in facilitating groups.

All subjects were pre-tested with the POI and ES Scale on the Thursday or Friday before their marathon weekend. A full range of scores emerged on the POI; the range of standard scores on the ES Scale was from 36 to 69. The first post-test was administered on the Friday following the marathon weekend and the delayed post-test was given three weeks after the first post-test. The two marathons for subjects in the experimental group were run on different weekends, so one-half the control group (randomly selected by sex) was tested (pre, post, delayed post) at the same time the first experimental group was tested and the remaining control subjects were tested at the same

time as the second experimental group. Subjects in the control group participated in the same type of marathon group experience as those in the experimental group after they (control subjects) completed the three testings.

Results

Treatment effects were examined through an analysis of covariance design, using POI pretreatment scores as the covariate. One series of one-way analyses of covariance was performed on the 12 POI scale scores from the first post-testing (five days after the marathon group), and the second series was performed on scores obtained on the delayed post-test (three weeks after the first post-test).

Table 1 presents the unadjusted means, standard deviations and probability levels of the experimental and control groups on each testing. Using an alpha level of .05, it can be seen that significant differences between the experimental and control groups appear on the first post-test on the Inner-Directedness, Spontaneity, Self-Regard, Self-Acceptance and Synergy Scales. By the second post-testing the differences diminish slightly so that only those on the Spontaneity and Synergy Scales maintain statistical significance. On the second post-testing, however, three scales attain significance which did not initially do so: Self-Actualizing Value, Nature of Man and Acceptance of Aggression.

Insert Table 1 About Here

The role of ego strength in affecting outcome was studied by computing partial correlations between scores on the Ego Strength Scale and change scores on the POI from the pre- to the first post-test. Pre-test scores on the POI were partialled out of this relationship (held constant statistically). The partial correlations are presented on Table 2.

Insert Table 2 About Here

None of the correlations approach the .05 level of confidence, and, in fact, four of the 12 coefficients are negative. One might conjecture that the expected positive relationship between ego strength and changes in self-actualization did not attain statistical significance because of the small sample size ($n = 14$). Such an hypothesis is disconfirmed, however, by the fact that three of the five coefficients that are at or above .30 are negative. While ego strength was uncorrelated with POI changes, it did significantly correlate with pretest scores on several POI scales: Time-Competence ($r = .72$, $p < .01$), Inner-Directedness ($r = .60$, $p < .05$), Self-Regard ($r = .55$, $p < .05$), Self-Acceptance ($r = 84$, $p < .01$).

Discussion

The results suggest that marathon-growth groups do positively affect self-actualization or positive mental health. This finding is consistent with the outcomes of three of the five studies cited earlier which employed non-treated control groups (Guinan & Foulds, 1970; Foulds, 1971; Young & Jacobson, 1971). At this point it might be helpful to contrast these studies (along with the present one) with those yielding negative results (Treppa & Fricke, 1972; University of Massachusetts Counseling Center Staff, 1972). Such an analysis yields two salient factors which differentiate studies with positive results from those with negative findings. First, the Treppa and Fricke investigation employed only one group facilitator, a graduate student, while all studies with positive results utilized two leaders per group, with one exception (Foulds, 1971). In the latter case, the facilitator was highly experienced, along with being a prominent author and researcher in the area

of growth groups. In addition, this group met for a total of 36 hours (eight weekly meetings, four and one-half hours per meeting). The total amount of meeting time is the second differentiating factor. The four studies which obtained positive results employed a minimum of 15 hours of group time, while of the two studies with negative results, one utilized only 10 hours of meeting time (University of Massachusetts Counseling Center Staff, 1972) and the other did not specify the amount of time devoted to the group (Treppa & Fricke, 1972). Thus, it may be hypothesized that for growth groups to have the desired impact they should (a) either employ more than a single leader or, if not, the facilitator should be highly experienced; (b) be continued for at least 15 hours.

The present results also indicate that the effects of marathon-growth groups may persist for at least four weeks. This finding seems particularly significant because the immediate post-group "high" typically experienced by participants is by now well documented (e.g., Mintz, 1967). Since nearly all outcome studies have heretofore utilized immediate (or nearly so) post-testing, a question arises as to whether previous studies have simply tapped this post-group mood rather than revealing more durable effects. Along with suggesting more durable effects, the present study indicated that on three of the POI scales effects emerged on the delayed post test which did not appear on the immediate post test. While this result may be an artifact of the statistical design, it does at least suggest the possibility of a sleeper effect. Relatedly, at least two of the three scales (Nature of Man and Self-Actualizing Values) on which a delayed effect emerged seem to measure more "philosophical-cognitive" processes than do most POI scales. It seems reasonable that the effects of a group experience on such variables would require more time to manifest themselves.

Finally, although ego strength was positively related to self-actualization to begin with, it was not associated with changes in self-actualization following participation in a growth group. In response to the subtitle of this paper, it appears that the strong (high ego strength) do get stronger (manifest higher levels of self-actualization) as a result of participation in a marathon-growth group---but so do the "not-so-strong", and to about the same extent. The conclusiveness of this interpretation is limited by the fact that it was derived from an ex post facto correlational analysis. In addition, none of the participants manifested an exceedingly low level of ego strength to begin with (the lowest score on the ES Scale was 36; Mean = 50, SD = 10). Thus, it may be concluded that within a generally normal range of ego strength, this variable does not affect in any clearcut, linear fashion the extent to which participants profit from a marathon-growth group. Since it seems clear that all participants do not profit equally from a group (Yalom & Lieberman, 1971), the search for likely client moderators needs to continue.

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Experimental and Control Groups on the Personal Orientation Inventory[1]

		Experimental Group (n=14)		Control Group (n=14)		
Scale	Testing	M	SD	M	SD	p value
Time Competence	Pretest	42.4	13.0	48.4	13.2	
	Post 1	48.4	12.1	49.9	11.5	.29
	Post 2	50.1	10.7	48.4	12.7	.11
Inner Directedness	Pretest	48.6	11.5	48.2	14.7	
	Post 1	55.3	8.1	49.1	14.7	.01
	Post 2	56.5	8.4	50.2	15.7	.07
Self-Actualizing Values	Pretest	47.4	11.8	42.8	14.5	
	Post 1	50.4	10.9	44.1	14.6	.36
	Post 2	52.9	8.9	42.7	16.8	.04
Existentiality	Pretest	48.0	9.6	53.9	9.4	
	Post 1	53.7	8.5	54.6	9.1	.17
	Post 2	51.8	8.6	54.4	11.4	.67
Feeling Reactivity	Pretest	48.6	11.7	48.5	9.5	
	Post 1	53.2	9.4	50.8	10.2	.30
	Post 2	56.6	8.6	53.9	10.5	.33
Spontaneity	Pretest	51.7	11.3	51.9	12.6	
	Post 1	58.4	9.5	49.5	15.4	.01
	Post 2	58.3	10.6	50.9	15.9	.03
Self-Regard	Pretest	45.6	12.4	45.6	15.0	
	Post 1	52.1	8.5	43.8	13.8	.01
	Post 2	51.8	9.0	47.1	15.2	.14
Self-Acceptance	Pretest	49.0	11.9	49.1	11.5	
	Post 1	56.2	10.4	50.6	10.4	.02
	Post 2	54.7	10.6	48.6	12.5	.06
Nature of Man	Pretest	42.8	9.2	47.9	13.2	
	Post 1	50.9	10.1	50.1	15.3	.27
	Post 2	53.1	10.9	44.8	17.5	.01
Synergy	Pretest	46.8	10.9	44.9	13.5	
	Post 1	55.2	8.2	48.2	11.6	.03
	Post 2	54.7	8.1	38.9	13.7	.01
Acceptance of Aggression	Pretest	48.1	15.3	47.2	10.9	
	Post 1	53.9	9.6	48.8	12.9	.14
	Post 2	55.0	6.7	46.5	13.1	.02
Capacity for Intimate Contact	Pretest	49.0	13.0	52.5	8.8	
	Post 1	55.9	9.1	54.0	11.3	.14
	Post 2	56.2	10.0	55.7	10.0	.45

[1] Higher scores on the POI indicate higher levels of self-actualization.

Table 2

Correlations Between Ego Strength and POI Changes in Experimental Group (n=14)

POI Scale	r	POI Scale	r
Time Competence	- .30	Self-Regard	.24
Inner Directedness	.04	Self-Acceptance	.39
Self-Actualizing Value	.02	Nature of Man	- .30
Existentiality	- .33	Synergy	- .24
Feeling Reactivity	.04	Acceptance of Aggression	.33
Spontaneity	.05	Capacity for Intimate Contact	.22

* r required for $p < .05 = .44$ (one-tailed test)